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ABSTRACT

To assist the North Carolina League of Middle/Junior High Schools, this paper briefly surveys the literature on developmental characteristics of early adolescents and the characteristics of effective teachers and also discusses the implications of the findings for instruction and the curriculum. The authors first define early adolescence as the ages from 10 or 11 to 14 or 15 and then describe early adolescents' physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development, including the problems of exceptional adolescents. Their discussion of effective teachers and teaching techniques covers teacher expectations and other general characteristics; teacher self-esteem and leadership; classroom management skills; teacher-directed and student-initiated learning; and students' time on task. The paper's final section explores the implications for instruction and the curriculum both of the data gathered on adolescents and teachers and of theories of cognitive and ego development and developmental task sequences. (Author/RW)

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Increasing Effectiveness In Middle Grades Schools

A Study Of:
Developmental Characteristics
Effective Teacher Competencies
Implications For Curriculum And Instruction

by
C. Kenneth McEwin & Julia Thomason

Sponsored by
The North Carolina League of Middle/Junior High Schools and Appalachian State University

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PART I
Rationale

Ten years ago there was a genuine scarcity of materials discussing and illustrating developmental characteristics of early adolescents. Even less was available on necessary competencies for accommodating these characteristics to better insure quality curricular and instructional practices for this age group. Today there is considerably more.

Various opinions, studies, practical illustrations and descriptions of existing middle grades programs are represented in the literature. They appear under various headings and sources, from multiple and diverse perspectives, and under often conflicting auspices. Because so much of the current data on this developmental age group is controversial by virtue of both its very newness and the diversity of the clientele, support for almost any perspective dealing with the teaching/learning process for early adolescents can be found.

This monograph proposes to collect in a brief but somewhat complete document both the most significant new information on early adolescence and data to support the position advocated by the North Carolina League of Middle/Junior High Schools representing a majority opinion of educators in middle grades schools throughout the state. This monograph is an expansion of and clarification for the position paper drafted by the League last year.

This paper describes and illustrates the characteristics of middle grades students in terms of physical, social/emotional, and intellectual growth; illustrates to some degree the further complications inherrent for early adolescents with exceptionalities; discusses the characteristics of effective middle grades teachers; and explores the implications of teacher/learner data for curriculum and instruction.

PART II
The Middle Grades Learner

Some of the most significant changes in life are experienced during early adolescence. Within a relatively short span, growth breakthroughs that establish the foundations upon which late adolescence and adulthood are structured take place. These years are at times difficult, as youth struggle to straddle the overlapping worlds of childhood and adolescence. The relative security of childhood is best known to them, yet they are drawn by the lure of adolescence. They sometimes think and act as children, but to consider them so is a mistake. At other times they seem well on the way to maturity, but to consider them full-fledged adolescents is also a mistake. Early adolescents are experiencing major transitions - learning new roles, dealing with a rapidly changing body, and experiencing new expectations from almost all segments of their world (Mitchell, 1979).

It is during these years that these 19.8 million 10 to 14 year olds (Lipsitz, 1980) experience major changes in social, intellectual, and emotional development. Some of the major characteristics of the age group are discussed in this section of the monograph.

Early Adolescence

By viewing human development as a continuous process, it is evident that no clearly demarcated events characterize entrance into and exit from early adolescence. In recent years, however, increased attention has been focused on this middle years age group. Many names have been used to describe the youth of the period (transescents, preadolescents, "in-between-agers," etc), and there is little agreement on what age groups should be included. Typically, however, the ages from 10 or 11 to 14 or 15 are included (Thornburg, 1980b; Mitchell, 1979). It is widely recognized that overlap exists at both ends of these stated age ranges. The majority of these youth are found in grades five through eight.

Early adolescents have been neglected by researchers, educators, governmental agencies, youth serving agencies and other important groups (Lipsitz, 1977). Fortunately, in recent years interest in the education and welfare of these youth has increased significantly. This recognition has come about for at least two major reasons. First is the recognition that a gap exists regarding knowledge of this stage of development. A second major factor is the widespread increase in problems being experienced by large numbers of early adolescents, e.g., increased pregnancy rates, increased suicide rates, increased admissions to mental institutions (Lipsitz, 1977; 1980). The necessity of focusing more attention and effort on assisting these young people as they bid farewell to childhood and begin the arduous journey to adulthood must be recognized by all those responsible for their education and welfare.

Physical Development

Early adolescence is characterized by periods of pronounced and accelerated growth. The beginning of this growth is marked by increasing height, muscular strength and other growth changes. Early adolescents begin their growth spurt at different ages, but the growth pattern is usually the same for males and females. These growth patterns do differ greatly in timing and degree. For example, the growth spurt usually begins between the ages of 8 and 12 in girls and 9 to 13 in boys and ends between 15 and 18 and 17 to 20 respectively. Females mature at the rate of about one to two years earlier than males, but the sequential order in which development occurs is relatively consistent within each sex. The age of greatest variability in physical size and physiological development is approximately 13. Growth patterns make the period of early adolescence unique when compared to other times in life (Gatewood & Dilg, 1975).

The age of developmental maturity has moved into the preteen years (Sommers, 1978; Thornburg, 1980a). According to British pediatrician J.M. Tanner, the average age of the first menarche has declined an average of four months per decade for the past century (Tanner, 1972). Recent evidence, however, indicates that this trend is leveling off in Western, industrialized countries (Petersen, 1979; Eveleth & Tanner, 1976). Regardless of future maturational trends, it should be recognized that this phenomenon, when combined with other modern influences, has important implications for education.

The end results of this growth period differ greatly from person to person. Each individual establishes unique trademarks, idiosyncrasies, and peculiarities, while many commonalities, tendencies and needs also evolve (Mitchell, 1974). It is the responsibility of educators to learn more about these differences and commonalities, and to use this knowledge wisely. With the possible exception of very early life, no other growth period rivals that of early adolescence. No other period brings about such potential for social, emotional, and intellectual changes and the problems which frequently accompany them.

Social/Emotional Development

The comparative serenity of childhood is left behind during these years as emotions begin to play a key role in the life of early adolescents. They experience greater depth and breadth of emotions but the nature of these emotions more closely resemble those of childhood than those of late adolescence. Although these emotions are not always volatile, they can at times reach remarkable depths, e.g., jealousy, spite, envy. These emotions are more easily forgotten during this period, however, than in later years. They are not as expensive personally as those found in late adolescence and adulthood (Mitchell, 1979).

It is not uncommon for these youth to lose themselves in anger, love, fear, and other emotions as they experiment with the emergence of more adultlike feelings. They also become more idealistic and are frustrated when their ideals do not materialize. Early adolescents often criticize themselves and others unrealistically which may lead to feelings of uncertainty, anger, and frustration. Anger, though

usually short lived, is common among this age group (Georgiady & Romano, 1977).

It is also during this stage that feelings about parents, teachers, peers, and others begin to undergo significant changes. Interpersonal relationships take on a new perspective as the peer group gains in importance and adults are looked at with a new perspective. This new perspective includes the recognition that even the most trusted and loved adults are not perfect and cannot always be depended upon.

Learning to accept and be accepted by others is a vital task in early adolescence. Same-sex companionship is common during the 10th to 12th year with opposite-sex companionship coming in later development. Friendships that were more tentative in earlier years take on more solidarity during the middle years (Thornburg, 1980a).

Early adolescents are searching for self-identity amid confused sex-role models, a changing environment, and the impact of puberty. They experience not only exceptionally turbulent emotions, but a tremendous flexibility in self-concept (James, 1980). This flexibility of self-concept has numerous implications for teaching middle level students.

Fear, which often manifests itself in early adolescence, may emerge in the form of worries. Questions these youth may be dealing with include: Am I normal? Does anyone like me? What if I fail in school? What if I don't make the team? Fears related to areas such as death and religion are also sources of uncertainty. The fear of being ostracized or ridiculed by peers is a powerful force and at times yields such influence that early adolescents may compromise their own personal convictions rather than go against the peer group.

Conscience becomes more apparent during the period of early adolescence. Intense feelings about fairness, honesty, and values characterize this period of development (Georgiady & Romano, 1977). Morality is based more upon what has been absorbed from the culture of the age group than from thoughtful meditation or reflection. The conscience is more pragmatic than ideal and more egocentric than altruistic. A primary social goal during this period is to learn the skills which achieve recognition and esteem from peers. Early adolescents are easy to teach in some ways because they believe in the power of authority, their thought process is more geared to assimilate than to analyze, and they have limited ability to disagree with ideas beyond their range of experience (Mitchell, 1979).

Although the scope of this paper does not allow for full discussion of social and emotional development, it should remain paramount in the minds of all educators that these youth are experiencing important changes which have many implications for curriculum and instruction. Every attempt should be made to help these youngsters move successfully from the dependency of childhood to the relative independence of late adolescence and adulthood.

Intellectual Development

During early adolescence the vast majority of students are operating within Piaget's concrete and formal operational stages (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). The concrete stage is a very conceptual stage where information is organized around categories which are generalizable from one instance to another. The formal stage is characterized by formal thought and utilizes the components of logic and reasoning in decision making. This process is the beginning of the type of thought which exists in many adults (Thornburg, 1980b).

As early adolescents lose some of their dependence on what is perceived as reality, they begin to focus on what is possible. Some focus on the "here-and-now" while others develop the ability to deal with more advanced concepts. Moving toward this formal stage of thought enables some students to deal more readily with the possible and the abstract. They may be able to go beyond what might be and develop a high degree of intellectual curiosity (Compton, 1978; Gatewood & Dilg, 1975).

It should be realized, however, that the cognitive maturation of early adolescents is highly variable among individuals. For example, Toepfer reports that "The synthesis of available findings shows that no more than one percent of 10 year olds; five percent of 11 year olds; 12 percent of 12 year olds; 14 percent of 13 year olds; and 14 percent of 14 year olds have the capacity to even initiate formal operations" (Toepfer, 1980, p. 226).

Early adolescents begin to think with greater logic and consistency. Those who have reached the formal stage of thought are still novices, however, when compared to later stages of development. Mitchell offers insight into the cognitive process in the following statement: "For the most part, early adolescents are exempt from thinking extensively about larger issues such as government, race, or religion, and when they do think about these issues the reflections are essentially personal and immediate rather than abstract and general" (Mitchell, 1979, p. 20). This statement offers much to consider for educators and others involved in working with this age group.

Recent research on "brain periodization" suggests that there is a biological basis for the stages of cognitive development. Research indicates that from 85 to 90 percent of youngsters from 12 to 14 years of age are in a period of minimal to zero brain growth. During these periods, early adolescents should not be expected to develop new cognitive skills according to research results. Although the full effects of this research have not been considered by large segments of education, it holds great potential for the understanding of intellectual functioning (Toepfer, 1980).

Many members of this age group are still limited in their reasoning to immediate or past experiences and have difficulty with problems having more than two simultaneous dimensions or relations. Others, however, have negotiated the transition between the real and the impossible and are able to hypothesize contrary-to-fact possibilities (Baumrind, 1978). As in other areas of early adolescent development, wide diversity exists and must be considered when planning learning experiences.

The Exceptional Early Adolescent

Exceptional early adolescents are exceptional because proper attention to their needs requires special services and resources beyond those required for others. The special needs of these youth are created by measurable differences in their development and behavior. When these differences in academic performance, social adjustment, physical capabilities, language, vision, hearing, and so on become so marked that they can no longer be adequately served by regular programs of instruction, some form of special education is required (Wyne & O'Connor, 1979).

Although the scope of this section does not allow a full discussion of the many implications of the impact of early adolescence on these youth, it is evident that if early adolescence is a difficult time for those without exceptionalities, it is certainly a crucial time for those with additional differences. It has been noted by Mary Compton that during early adolescence, "to be different is to be doomed." This reality certainly deserves the attention of those responsible for serving exceptional youth in schools and other institutions and agencies. Specific attempts must be made to assure that the special needs of this group are met as they move toward maturity. Much potential for stress and uncertainty exists for those who have exceptionalities that directly affect their treatment by peers and other members of their world.

Conclusion

It is clear that less is known about the developmental stage of early adolescence than about any other time in life. Relatively little is known about the changing interactions of these youth in relation to their families, schools, peers, or communities (Lipsitz, 1980). Knowledge is increasing, however, and concentrated efforts should be

made to learn more about the behavior of these youth and the root causes of that behavior.

Early adolescence is a period characterized by transition, but should not be viewed simply as a transition. As noted by Lipsitz, "To see adolescence so exclusively as a transitional stage is to deny it the integrity we grant other stages of life. No large body of literature, for instance, refers to infancy or toddlerhood as transitional" (Lipsitz, 1980, p. 22). The label transitional, if literally defined, may serve as a barrier against concentrated attempts to enhance a more complete and accurate understanding of this important period.

Early adolescence is most certainly a period when stress and other difficult experiences occur for large numbers of youngsters. It is also clear that many of these youth are experiencing problems that a few years ago were faced primarily by older youth. Despite these and other difficulties, it should be remembered that much joy is associated with the period of transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. It is a time filled with new and exciting events. It is also a time filled with many pleasures as physical growth offers many novel and intriguing experiences; as mental growth allows a more comprehensive view of the world; as social growth unveils the excitement of new peer relationships and new views of comradeship; and psychological growth allows the emergence of the recognition of self as a primary person, not just a reflection of the expectations of parents, teachers, and society (Mitchell, 1979).

In the remainder of this monograph, some of the instructional and curricular implications to be drawn from knowledge about this age group are presented. Educators and others responsible for the education and welfare of this age group must possess a thorough understanding of the period if learning experiences consistent with early adolescent needs and interests are to become a reality.

PART III

Characteristics of Effective Teachers

Teaching early adolescents can at times provide the most rewarding, challenging or frustrating opportunities. Seemingly endless student diversity can cause a teacher's strongly held beliefs about education to weaken or become totally inoperative. If there is ever an example of moment-to-moment decision making - thinking on one's feet - it must be in teaching grades 4-9.

Following the discussion of developmental needs and characteristics of early adolescents, there is a need to look at those correlating characteristics to be sought or developed in middle grades teachers. Personality traits, teaching styles, and instructional competencies which predict the greatest likelihood of both successful learning experiences and career satisfaction are examined.

Foremost among essential characteristics is a thorough knowledge of human growth and development data pertinent to this age group. The pervasive turmoil accompanying physical, intellectual, and social/emotional development requires teacher understanding and acceptance. The plaintive cry that seventh graders should act their age could be countered with the notion that they probably *are*. Behaviors acceptable in the very old or very young are all too often intolerable in the child/adult of 12-15 years old.

Teachers who are unable to accept and understand early adolescent behavior may be the greatest barrier to educational success in middle grades schools. This idea is fostered by the results of various extensive and continuous efforts to determine to what degree school has any real effect on students and learning. In the Coleman Report of 1981, the single educational message is that *schools do make a difference* (Ravitch, 1981). And school factors that have the greatest influence (independent of family background) are the teachers' characteristics, not the facilities and curriculum (Austin, 1979).

Too often there has been major emphasis on curricular innovations, staff reorganizations, and facilities utilization with too little emphasis on teacher effectiveness strategies and instructional competencies. If indeed Austin and Coleman are accurate, perhaps teacher effectiveness should have been the primary target of middle grades reform. In many cases teachers are ill-prepared by pre- and in-service experiences for coping with middle grades students. Add to this lack of general preparation the necessity to accommodate mainstreamed youth with physical, emotional, and learning disabilities and one is immediately aware of the stressful and possible self-defeating situation facing many teachers.

Also, the somewhat pervasive admonition to educate early adolescents in a stress-free climate may have caused many practitioners to embrace strongly child-centered programs which overlook the fact that increasing maturation of youth in grades six through eight has many implications for more sophisticated programs. Too often educators have emphasized humanizing the curriculum, opening up classrooms, and personalizing instruction to the extent of abdicating their educational responsibilities to teach fundamental skills.

A more defensible position would be for middle grades teachers to promote a program which balances genuine efforts to accommodate diverse learning styles and competencies with societal expectations for basic skills. Thus the major task would be to accept the stresses and insecurities of early adolescence while at the same time providing a challenging, productive, and purposeful environment. This then would necessitate that teachers be aware of their own behavior patterns, accept diversity in others, interact in meaningful ways with other adults as well as students, and provide consistent leadership models.

Additionally a balanced program would necessitate that teachers be competent in managing the learning environment, increasing quality learning time-on-task for all students, and indicating through planning and presentation a thorough knowledge of subject content.

General Characteristics

Traditionally valid characteristics of competent teachers, effective instructional techniques, and classroom management strategies remain quite basic and, perhaps because of that, command little attention or controversy. In our highly complicated, technological age, simple statements may be ignored as common knowledge; or, because of their very simplicity, they may be viewed with outright ridicule.

To a considerable degree, effective middle grades practitioners have two strengths - subject matter competence and a knowledge of early adolescent behavior. Because of these, they give greater attention to professional decisions, balance teacher-directed and student-initiated learning, and have far fewer disciplinary disruptions because of their classroom management skills. Thus they leave themselves greater opportunities to actually teach and increase opportunities for students to learn.

According to recent research compiled by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1981), the most promising way to improve the teaching/learning climate in most schools is to put the following principles to use. In effective schools:

1. Teachers hold high expectations for students.
2. Student progress is carefully monitored.
3. The classroom climate is business-like, with teacher-directed student activity and an achievement orientation.
4. Materials used are at the appropriate level of difficulty, neither too hard nor too easy.
5. There is greater reliance on praise than criticism.
6. Good planning and classroom management assure adequate time-on-task.
7. Students have the opportunity to learn expected content.

These principles are quite compatible with developmental needs of early adolescents. These students need reliable, consistent role models as described by the professional tone of the above statements. Many students are in need of remediation in basic subject areas and are thus dependent on teacher selected and directed content and experiences. None of these principles are in opposition to humanistic concerns for a stress-free environment *if* teachers recognize the level of student sophistication and resultant strengths and limitations.

Additional attention must be paid to the exceptional learner who may bring restrictive or debilitating handicaps to the classroom. While there is little separating an effective special education teacher from an effective regular classroom teacher, there are matters of degree (Alexander and George, 1981).

Regular classroom teachers need to be particularly careful to accept exceptional children without formation of negative expectations based on appearance or preconceptions. They must also learn as much as possible about the identification, characteristics, and treatment of the various disabilities. Resources, both in personnel and soft/hardware should be investigated and their best application reviewed. Teachers might prepare students within the classes to accept and accommodate the exceptional student if conditions warrant. Additional planning might be given to the most beneficial grouping patterns within the class. And, as always, consistency in expectations and responses is essential.

Leadership and Self-Esteem

Because of the unpredictable nature of early adolescents, teachers for middle grades must have strong self-concepts and present consistent, reliable role models. During this time of increased stress coupled with insecurity, young people look to adults who are in control of themselves, their lives, and their work environment.

Teachers who are effective and competent in these areas demonstrate them by:

1. Willingly taking risks and accepting new challenges
2. Being receptive to new ideas
3. Being less concerned with power and ego
4. Being sensitive to the feelings of others
5. Having a sense of humor
6. Being flexible without appearing inconsistent
7. Being accepting without appearing unprincipled
8. Managing classrooms without being overly controlling and rigid
9. Having respect from the students without being feared
10. Avoiding the use of sarcasm and ridicule as disciplinary methods
11. Having a pervasive sense of rightness about classroom procedures

Additionally, effective middle grades teachers "have greater understanding of principles of learning, have realistic and appropriate goals, provide immediate feedback, more opportunities for learners, and in general, produce a more coherent presentation" (McCormick, 1979, p.60).

A climate of expectation where roles have been defined and expectations clearly stated exemplifies assertive leadership and purposefulness. Teachers who establish themselves as repsected classroom leaders encourage students to collaborate in becoming more involved in their own learning, to take risks in terms of attempting the more difficult tasks, and to rise above minimum levels of competence.

Classroom Management

"Statistics reveal that the prime cause of teacher dropout after a few years is the inability to develop effective discipline procedures" (Wiles and Bondi, 1981, p. 69). In addition, the 1981 Gallup Survey reports "discipline continues, as it has for many years, to be regarded as the number one problem facing the local public schools" (Gallup, 1981, p. 34). Thus, while it is often an overly convenient scapegoat for other less obvious problems, it is a significant determiner for successful teaching.

Those teachers who are skilled in content planning and presentation have few if any disciplinary interruptions and may be surprised at the amount of attention given to this concern. Those teachers are both competent in their various areas of study and good managers; because when one does not manage well, disruptions occur more frequently and less time is devoted to teaching. And these disruptions are not limited to student outbursts or insolence. Teachers who allow inappropriate socializing and who participate in the same are promoting an undisciplined classroom climate. Teachers who encourage distractions of any kind are weakening the standards accompanying a business-like atmosphere which provides greater engaged time-on-task behaviors.

Effective teachers accommodate the early adolescent's concern with peer approval and identification by arranging lessons to productively involve students in a somewhat social interaction while stessing the purposes and learning outcomes of the task. Knowing that many disciplinary infractions occur because of an inadequate curriculum with inappropriate materials causing student failure and resulting in negative self-concept, effective teachers motivate, reward, and assertively forestall disruptions by providing materials guaranteeing a high degree of learner success.

In structuring activities for students needing either remediation or special services, teachers must recognize and accomodate the need for peer recognition and approval as well as what might be an idealized self image. Activities should represent the required sophistication appropriate for early adolescents and should be assigned without obvious indicators of any appreciable difference either in content, grade level reading difficulty, or method of presentation. "Through creative and sensitive planning, teachers can devise face-saving, yet effective, ways to help students begin to compensate for long-standing achievement deficits" (Brown, McDowell, and Smith, 1981, p. 251).

To whatever extent possible, competent teachers provide a somewhat flexible classroom climate where students are able to communicate and work in a relaxed manner. While these teachers may hold a strong student-centered philosophy, as Rosenshine (1979) points out, "permissiveness, spontaneity, and lack of control in classrooms were found to be negatively related to not only gain in achievement but also to positive growth in creativity, skills of inquiry, writing ability, and self-esteem" (p. 41).

Thus effective teachers accommodate this student-centeredness in defining their fundamental purposes and objectives, and support the premise that while "children taught by direct instruction may score well on tests but not be as imaginative, resourceful, or self-confident as they might have been" (Peterson, 1979, p. 34), they also are unlikely to learn the essential skills of motivation and self-discipline in a chaotic atmosphere where anarchy reigns.

Finally, and perhaps most basically, effective teachers:

1. Start class on time and are prepared
2. Have clearly defined standards for classroom conduct
3. Have classroom rules formulated with student input and accommodating the physical requirements of early adolescence
4. Consistently follow through on expectations, punishments and rewards

Teacher Directedness and Time-On-Task

Because of increasing sophistication in early adolescence, we may expect students to take greater responsibility for much of their learning and to demand more input into its content and pace. However, we must not be unrealistic about the degree to which

students, even at this age, can manage time, plan appropriate activities, learn independently, and critically evaluate their progress.

Characteristic of this age, students have a need for a high success rate when mastering ever more difficult content requiring higher level thinking skills. Also, they have intense, though short-lived, interests in a wide variety of topics. Effective teachers, then, can capitalize on these two factors to reach even the most recalcitrant learners.

These teachers will use student interests and effective instructional techniques to provide a rapid but attainable pace as well as a supportive, interactive climate for students. They will provide an optimal mix of teacher-directedness and student-initiated learning activities.

Teachers who have a basic and thorough knowledge of both the content and the variety of instructional methods suggested by that content will be more competent in making educational decisions which increase quality engaged time-on-task behaviors. These teachers would not begin a lesson plan with what they were going to do so much as with what they planned to accomplish - learning outcomes and evaluative objectives. For example, effective teachers immediately recognize that a lecture format to teach library skills results in less active involvement for students than perhaps an inquiry/discovery approach. Using the latter method, a teacher could structure interaction among students with varied levels of expertise resulting in differing learning outcomes based on student capabilities and at the same time guaranteeing success for each learner.

Teachers who are knowledgeable about both subjects and students are capable of making sound educational decisions concerning the appropriate balance between teacher-directedness and student initiative. Overuse of teacher-centeredness would be as devastating to a well-rounded program for early adolescents as allowing so many student-oriented electives that fundamentals are ignored and basic concepts unlearned. In striving for this balance, teachers may question the "usefulness of the 'universal prescriptions' common in educational advocacy in which teachers are encouraged to give pupils more freedom without specifying to what degree or in what respect, or toward what objective..." (Soar and Soar, 1979, p. 118).

According to Barak Rosenshine (1979), direct instruction is effective for producing student learning in basic skills. And, as Jere Brophy (1979) points out, "direct instruction is easier to plan and manage, provides for more modeling of correct thinking and responses for slower students, and avoids the elitism and labeling problems that can crop up when ability grouping is used" (p. 34).

Thus, because teacher direction and selection of activities have been positively correlated with achievement, when the objective calls for acquisition of basic skills, utilizing teacher-directed instruction is most appropriate. And when learning has moved beyond fact, recall, and skill levels toward concept and values learning, alternative and diverse methods are called for. Teachers hold the key to balancing the program and thus the key to reaching a greater number of early adolescents and to challenging students toward greater degrees of self-discipline and motivation.

Of much significance here also is the importance of constant teacher monitoring and immediate feedback. While "frequency counts of criticism of students by teachers continue to yield negative correlations with achievement" (Rosenshine, 1979, p. 30), enabling teacher responses have a positive effect when the praise given is genuinely deserved, thus increasing student self-esteem.

Effective teachers display an enthusiasm for the subject as well as for the learning process in order to encourage attention and promote active interest. Enthusiasm here refers not to mere entertainment nor necessarily to showmanship, but to a great sense of commitment, excitement, and involvement with the subject. "It has been found that all other things being equal, a teacher who presents materials with appropriate gestures, animation, and eye contact will have students who achieve better on tests than will the teacher who does not gesture, reads in a monotone, and generally behaves in an unenthusiastic manner" (Cruikshank, 1980, p.212).

In summary, effective middle grades teachers balance teacher-directed activities and content with student interests and encourage more time-on-task and purposefulness in well managed classrooms by:

1. Increasing contact with students by becoming more involved with the students as they work
2. Using direct questioning techniques in order to keep constantly aware of the level of comprehension of students for the content being presented
3. Allowing little time lapse between completion of work and return of evaluation thus better insuring mastery learning of concepts and continuous progress toward the learning outcomes and objectives
4. Allowing few interuptions in the class routine thus assuring adequate engaged time for students to learn the expected content
5. Permitting few disciplinary interruptions and allowing little negative behavior
6. Accepting and accommodating the diversity present within early adolescence
7. Recognizing and compensating for whatever learning or physical disabilities students within the classroom might have
8. Working to reduce all students' dependence on the authority and direction of the teacher
9. Providing a caring, consistent role model for students who are seeking stable, reliable adults with whom to interact

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PART IV
Implications For Instruction

Investigations of student diversity in both cognitive ability and developmental needs as well as characteristics of effective teachers suggest a significant need for curricular and instructional examination, modification, and diversification. Early adolescent patterns, rates, and levels of knowledge coupled with varied learning styles, evolving identity, and increasingly sophisticated developmental tasks are so diverse at this age that the need to accommodate as many different learning techniques and developmental considerations as possible is mandatory.

While the term individualizing instruction causes mixed response from skepticism to outright rejection, the term diversification to accommodate individual differences should connote something quite different. The suggestion of a different lesson plan or individual educational program for each student is more difficult to comprehend and implement than the concept of varying activities and objectives which both diversify presentations and increase the potential for complimenting individual learning styles, needs, and capacities.

Teachers all too often feel proficient with only a single style of presentation - most frequently lecture/recitation - to the exclusion of other more effective, alternative approaches. Teachers pressed with both time and numbers concerns may retreat to this single preparation mode which is less time consuming and has a simpler delivery mechanism. Preparing one lecture to be delivered six times to 135 students is without question easier for teachers than preparation of several formats of the same lesson utilizing knowledge of both developmental stage needs and cognitive abilities. However, while this method facilitates the teaching business, it is grossly mindless of the learning outcomes.

Anyone who disputes evidence that students have different learning styles and differing developmental needs, especially within the

designation of early adolescence, has been remiss in reading the educational research and development literature of the last decade. Many learning styles experts report that some students learn best when the teacher stands in front of the class and determines the course content and presentation, some learn best in small groups with free exchange, and some when given instruction and then left alone to accomplish a task. The problem arises when the learning outcomes are not reconciled with the most effective and efficient teaching/ learning strategies.

This section reemphasizes what has been discussed previously concerning developmental characteristics of early adolescents and characteristics of effective middle grades teachers. Practical implications for curriculum and instruction for grades four through nine are also discussed. In order to make this discussion more meaningful, it is necessary to review concrete and formal operations, consider the developmental tasks which are most appropriate to this age level, investigate the identity crises occuring during this period, and examine briefly the different considerations necessary to match learning styles to objectives and expectations of early adolescents.

In each of these discussions, particular attention needs to be paid to the information supporting the belief that early adolescents do not fit into any single category or level, but span at least two stages. One cannot isolate only the middle childhood characteristics because some early adolescents have passed through this stage and are more characteristic of adolescents. Emphasis here is on particular strategies, treatments, tasks and, implications for middle grades teachers of all subjects. Furthermore, attention is given to providing reference sources for teachers who wish to learn more about any of the different theories discussed.

Cognitive and Formal Operations

"The work of Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget is by now so familiar that his name has become a household - or at least a classroom-word. Yet his theories have so far failed to substantially influence practice in most classrooms" (Dyrli, 1976, p. 78). Many teachers who are unfamiliar with his work fear inclusion of his theories as radical changes. Others are so bound to the textbook illustrations and objectives they can see no way to depart from the scope and sequence in order to accommodate new knowledge of what skills are applicable.

"Often as teachers, we confuse the process of extending the mental functions of the student and just overloading the present functions with too much information. This constant overloading of the mind with massive amounts of information can only cause mental indigestion, not an increase in the diverse functions of the mind" (Greene & Lawrence, 1979, p. 13).

A look at the conditions of concrete and formal operations points out that early adolescents are usually not isolated in one stage or another but are in transition. While many operations are in the concrete domain, some students at all times and many students at some times can function with formal logic.

"As the name of the stage (concrete) implies, a child in this stage begins to think logically, but thinking is primarily concrete rather than abstract. In other words, while he can now perform simple operations of logic in the abstract, he can do more advanced thinking if given physical objects to manipulate" (Dyrli, 1976, p. 80).

"Most middle grades students use only concrete logic" (Greene & Lawrence, 1979, p. 13). The progression toward more formal logic is not a spontaneous part of the maturation process; it must be encouraged, fostered, and its development overseen by a teacher who is first of all competent in formal logic and equipped with skills to aid student progress.

The goal here, beginning at ages 11-12 and continuing throughout life, is to develop the capacity to interpret symbols and deal with verbal ideas without having to manipulate physical objects. In other words, teachers want to encourage students to be increasingly able to deal in abstract terms.

To accommodate present views of learning and intellectual development, the role of the classroom teacher must shift dramatically to that of diagnostician, guide, resource person, and evaluator (Kindred et.al, 1976). A teacher must strive to increase thinking skills by:

1. Arranging teaching sequences to begin with concrete ideas explained through demonstration, examples, and actions (At a later time formal definitions of the same ideas are presented.)
2. Having students explore the activities before introducing the next concept thus giving students opportunity to work with objects and allowing them to ask their own questions and follow their own interests concerning that concept
3. Beginning class discussions with simple demonstrations and challenging students to raise questions or predict outcomes
4. Encouraging students to interact with one another during discussions. By learning viewpoints of others, they will become more aware of their own reasoning. Students who would not ask the teacher certain questions may be more relaxed and secure with peers.
5. Asking students to justify their own conclusions, predictions, and inferences whether these are correct or incorrect. Students too often assume that when teachers ask for more information or some type of clarification their answer is incorrect and rush to find another.
6. Trying to be as receptive as possible to apparently off-the-track ideas, not rejecting a timid first attempt, but encouraging it by drawing attention to its good or unusual points
7. Being willing to reason out loud and to reveal that teachers are at times unable to proceed with a problem. Model the reasoning behavior hoped for in students.

Developmental Tasks Sequences

Robert Havighurst in *Human Development and Education* (1953) identified a series of "developmental tasks, the successful achievement of which contributes to satisfactory personality growth during various times of life" (Williams & Stith, 1980, p. 308). An understanding of these developmental tasks is necessary to enable teachers to structure lessons to accomplish the two-fold purposes of education -cognition and personal development. Additionally, teachers use developmental task information to better time the introduction of educational efforts.

As described in the discussion of concrete and formal operations, early adolescents often span two developmental task groups as discussed by Havighurst. While many early maturing middle graders are already coping with the more sophisticated tasks of early adolescence, a significant number of "late bloomers" may well be coping with tasks of middle childhood. Teachers must therefore plan for both levels when proposing activities and experiences.

The following are selected examples which represent a cross section of middle childhood and early adolescent developmental tasks:

1. Building wholesome attitudes toward self as a growing organism
2. Learning to get along with age-mates
3. Learning appropriate masculine and feminine social roles
4. Developing concepts necessary for everyday living
5. Developing conscience, morality, and a scale of values
6. Achieving personal independence
7. Using the body effectively and accepting one's physique
8. Achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults

9. Selecting and preparing for an occupation
10. Developing intellectual skills
11. Achieving socially responsible behavior

Teachers can accommodate these developmental tasks for all learners in any subject by incorporating the following techniques into the instructional plan:

1. Utilizing peer teaching for facilitating communication and development with age mates
2. Inviting community representatives who present non-stereotypic career role models to facilitate both a developing sense of masculine and feminine roles, as well as occupational preparation.
3. Emphasizing use of reference skills and interdisciplinary studies to both remediate fundamental skills in reading, writing, and calculating as well as to encourage development of more advanced intellectual skills.
4. Supporting and participating in some type of teacher-based advisory program to provide guidance for early adolescents in developing attitudes toward social groups and institutions as well as coping with insecurities resulting from a diminishing reliance on parents and other adults.
5. Encouraging students to discuss moral development issues of relevance to them both as idividuals and as members of a larger community and society. This facilitates development of conscience and moral judgement.
6. Fostering the development of intramural programs in both athletics *and* academics in order to help many students better understand and accept their physical and intellectual capacities without the debilitating strain of more advanced competition.

Recognizing the appropriate developmental task for each student as well as for each class or grade can greatly aid the teacher in at least two ways. First, the teacher can capitalize on the more obvious tasks in planning instruction. If indeed, working with age-mates is a primary task of middle graders, then small group work, peer-to-peer and group project activities are an integral part of lesson planning. Also, teachers who are aware of the various developmental forces acting on early adolescents can more nearly come to accept what many others would view as radical or irresponsible behavior. This would be of great benefit to those teachers who are participants in an advisor/ advisee program where students are more open and free with their opinions and concerns.

Identity Crises and Development of Ego

Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society* (1963) proposed a personality model divided into eight senses: trust, autonomy, initiative, industry (accomplishment), identity, generativity, and integrity. He suggests that these stages begin at birth and extend throughout life and that the successful accomplishment of each state is paramount for success at succeeding stages (Williams and Stith, 1980).

Those stages occurring prior to middle grades may be of considerable interest to teachers of early adolescents because of the impact of failure at any one stage and its resultant influence on the personality of the student. If a child has been exposed to only mistrust, doubt, and guilt prior to early adolescence, there is a considerable task of remediation and ego-enhancing to be done.

Students who have been told, either by school or parents, that they are incapable of doing for themselves arrive at middle grades with no self-confidence. This is true for average students as well as those with learning or physical disabilities. In fact, many disabled youth may be better equipped to handle the doubt associated with attempting new tasks than are others. They might well have been prepared differently by their experiences to handle these emotions of self-doubt and inability.

Students who, while they may have come from backgrounds of family trust and personal autonomy, may well have met with a teacher who inculcated a lack of initiative thus guilt. To tell a middle grades learner that he or she is not trying could be the most devastating comment a teacher can make. For students at this level of ego-identity, the concept of trying one's best is of paramount concern. And when there is the suggestion that this effort is not being made, students may be consumed by guilt and inferiority. The syndrome of "I can't do it" begins when initiative is not rewarded and fostered.

However, according to Erikson, stages which were blemished with unsuccessful attempts resulting in negative self-concepts can be rectified by success at later stages. Met with a student who demonstrates either the fatalistic attitudes of failure or the belligerent distinctions of a bully filled with guilt and doubt, the effective and aware middle grades teacher can structure tasks to capitalize on autonomy and success as well as to encourage initiative and self-assurance.

Of particular interest to middle grades teachers then are the two stages (senses) of industry and identity. There is much evidence to support the contention that most early adolescents range between these two stages rather than being in one distinct from the other. As with concrete and formal operations and the developmental tasks discussed earlier, the early adolescent period of ego development forms a bridge between childhood and adulthood.

During early adolescence, students who are operating primarily at the industry stage take great pleasure in what they perceive to be "real work" and the completion and results of each project. They require that tasks come to completion and that this accomplishment be recognized and to some extent acknowledged with praise when that praise is genuine and merited. They focus attention on tasks for extended periods of time and work diligently at tasks they view as relevant and for which they feel capable.

Students at this stage (industry) undertake tasks for which there are obvious rewards such as merit badges, gold stars, or monetary prizes. This supports their growing need for independence and personal autonomy.

Effective middle grades teachers who can understand and implement the requirements and desirable outcomes of this stage will provide opportunities for:

1. Reaffirming the positive results of prior stages of ego-development by providing many activities which have guaranteed success for each student
2. Praising and rewarding students with tangible measures which, while extrinsic in nature, satisfy the sense of accomplishment in a job well done
3. Promote a class sense of optimism and creativity with learners displaying success in varied fashions and with diverse outcomes.
4. Establishing a pattern which capitalizes on industriousness by using project-oriented, learning activities with definite beginnings and endings, thus fostering this need to see tasks come to completion

Subsequent to the industry stage is that of identity and all its ramifications for early adolescents. Much has been written about middle graders and their search for self; and it is through a knowledge of this stage of ego development and proper accommodation techniques that teachers can make a significant impact on students. Proper accommodation of this stage will result in a healthy personality. Improper teacher expectations may cause such a sense of incompetence and unworthiness in the young person that the resulting role confusion is evidenced by delinquent behavior and attention commanding outbursts.

At this stage of identity versus role confusion, the teacher's task is somewhat confounded by the student's lessening dependence on all

adults for reinforcement and reflection. Now the crucial question centers around what the student thinks about self rather than what others might think.

Effective middle grades teachers can help foster a healthy personality for all students by:

1. Providing an opportunity to discuss confusions, dilemmas, and interpersonal issues related to the proper role in society
2. Giving attention to the need for early adolescents to try out various types of personalities until one is found that fits. This means accepting what may appear as phony or unrealistic behaviors from students.
3. Making accomodations for errors in judgement resulting from the general confusion present during this stage
4. Enhancing positive evidences of a growing, maturing sense of self
5. Presenting learning opportunities which would help in the selection of a career, partner, or appropriate adventures
6. Being available to students for one-to-one conversations
7. Being confidential with dialogue
8. Being a reliable, consistent role model who presents the characteristics of a healthy personality having been through the various ego-development stages and ready to proceed to the next

Relying on successful teaching experiences and growing awareness of ego-development, developmental tasks, and thinking operations changes, teachers can better understand the goals necessary to meet specific student needs at respective stages of development. Perhaps it is time for effective teachers construct a scope and sequence plan for the development of a healthy ego along with a successful learning experience during the middle grades years.

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